

Early Wagon Trains: First Entered Utah in 1841

By THERON H. LUKE

When did the first wagon train go through Utah?

Not 1847, as many Utahns would venture, but six years earlier — in 1841. And in 1846 three — and very probably four — trains went through, one of them blazing a trail followed virtually in its wheel tracks by the Mormons, the following year.

This was the ill-fated Donner Party, which followed the Hastings Cutoff from where Henefer is today over Big and Little Mountains and down Emigration Canyon into Salt Lake Valley. The next year Brigham Young told Orson

Pratt to seek out the Donner trail and take advantage of it, which was done.

It was in 1841 that a wagon train of 80 people started West over the Oregon Trail, one of the first large single trains to make the journey. At about where Soda Springs is now, 32 people in 10 wagons under the leadership of two men named Bartleson and Bidwell branched off and headed south with California as their destination. They came into Cache Valley from the north and followed the Bear River down to about the site of present day Corrine.

Here they headed northwest

around the northern tip of Great Salt Lake, following just about where the transcontinental railroad was to go near 30 years later. They headed out into northwestern Utah (then Mexican territory and part of a vast area known on the scanty maps as Upper or Eastern California) before turning southwest into present day Nevada and eventually to coastal California. Somewhere in northwestern Utah they abandoned their wagons, made pack animals out of their teams and continued their precarious journey. They were the real pioneers of wagon travel westward. It was a

tremendously difficult journey but they all made it.

With them were Mrs. Benjamin Kelsey and her small daughter, the first white females to go through Utah. True, they traversed only the northern part, but their journey took them well within the bounds of Utah today.

With exception of trappers and army exploring and mapping parties, Utah saw no more emigrant travel until 1846. In that year two parties of horsemen and three or four wagon trains passed through Utah, with exception of one of parties of horsemen who came into the area from the north

and back the same way. Nine men of the Russell - Bryant party on horses and mules came west from Fort Bridger down Weber Canyon into Great Salt Lake Valley, traveled around the south end of the lake, across the Salt Flats and on to California. John C. Fremont, army officer in charge of a small military exploring party, had traveled the Salt Flats (on horses but without wagons) the year before in 1845, and Lansford W. Hastings had come across them west to east on horseback early in 1846.

The same year the Harlan - Young (the latter was no

relation to Brigham) wagon train went down Weber Canyon, coming out near present day Ogden and following virtually the same route as the Russell - Bryant Party.

Following the same route (down Weber Canyon) the Lienhard wagon train came through soon after the Harlan - Young group. The Lienhard train was small, but the total of the Lienhard and Harlan - Young groups was perhaps 60 wagons.

Somewhere in between came the James Mathers train, only

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